

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3762

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, SN

SUBJECT: SINGAPORE HAS NEW MINISTER FOR EDUCATION

1. GOS ANNOUNCED YESTERDAY THAT MR. CHUA SIAN CHIN, NOW MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS, WILL FROM TODAY "BE IN FORMAL CHARGE OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, RELIEVING THE PRIME MINISTER OF HIS DIRECT RESPONSIBILITY." ANNOUNCEMENT SAID THAT DAY-TO-DAY ADMINISTRATION WILL CONTINUE TO BE DISCHARGED BY SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR EDUCATION CHAI CHONG YII, WHILE CHUA WILL CHAIR MONTHLY MEETINGS TO REVIEW AND DISCUSS MATTERS OF POLICY.

2. CHUA, 41, HAS LAW DEGREE FROM U.K. AND HAS BEEN ACTIVE IN PAP AFFAIRS FOR PAST TEN YEARS. FOR ABOUT THREE YEARS IN EARLY SIXTIES, HE WAS MEMBER OF PRIME MINISTER'S LAW FIRM. IN 1968 HE WAS ELECTED TO PARLIAMENT AND BECAME MINISTER FOR HEALTH, AND IN 1972 WAS ALSO MADE MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS. IN CABINET RESHUFFLE THIS JUNE, CHUA, DESCRIBED AS OVERTAXED, WAS RELIEVED OF HEALTH PORTFOLIO. BUT HE HAS NOW ADDED ONE OF MOST DIFFICULT AND CONTROVERSIAL, EDUCATION.

3. GOS ANNOUNCEMENT LAID EMPHASIS ON BILINGUAL LEADERSHIP IN
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EDUCATION MINISTRY, POINTING OUT THAT CHUA IS ENGLISH-EDU-

CATED AND BILINGUAL IN CHINESE WHILE OTHER TOP OFFICIALS ARE CHINESE-EDUCATED AND EFFECTIVELY BILINGUAL IN ENGLISH. THIS IN TURN WAS RELATED, IN THE ANNOUNCEMENT, TO A "MORE PRONOUNCED TREND" TOWARD THE ENGLISH STREAM IN PRIMARY SCHOOL ENTRANTS. THIS YEAR 83 PERCENT OF PRIMARY I STUDENTS REGISTERED FOR ENGLISH AND ONLY 17 PERCENT FOR CHINESE, A THREE PERCENT SHIFT FROM CHINESE TO ENGLISH OVER LAST YEAR.

4. COMMENT: CHUA IS FOURTH PERSON IN CHARGE OF MINISTRY OF EDUCATION IN FIVE MONTHS. IN THE JUNE RESHUFFLE, LEE CHIAW MENG WAS REPLACED BY TOH CHIN CHYE, BUT TOH ASKED TO BE RELIEVED TWO WEEKS LATER WHEREUPON THE PRIME MINISTER HIMSELF ASSUMED RESPONSIBILITY. GAME OF MUSICAL CHAIRS FOR TOP PAP MANAGERS IS TYPICAL OF SINGAPORE, AS IS PRACTICE OF OVERLOADING ONE MAN WITH VARIETY OF HEAVY RESPONSIBILITIES. IT APPEARS THAT PRIME MINISTER PLACES FULL FAITH AND CONFIDENCE IN SELECT FEW. EDUCATION MINISTRY IS PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT ONE TO HANDLE BECAUSE OF SHIFTING GOS TACTICS ON ENGLISH-CHINESE BILINGUALISM, GENERAL APPREHENSION AMONG ADULT CHINESE-EDUCATED POPULATION THAT GOS INTENDS TO MAKE ENGLISH THE DOMINANT LANGUAGE, AND PARENTAL CONCERN THAT IN EFFORT TO PROMOTE BILINGUALISM THEIR CHILDREN END UP NOT REALLY PROFICIENT IN EITHER LANGUAGE. CHUA'S APPOINTMENT ADDS ANOTHER ELEMENT TO COMPLICATED SITUATION AND DOES NOT OF ITSELF SHED ANY CLEAR LIGHT ON FUTURE GOS POLICY TOWARD BILINGUALISM. HOLDRIDGE

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